

Foreword

History Lessons: What *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods* Teaches Us

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One of Michel Foucault's most enduring lessons has significant implications for critically engaging histories of education, a central concern of *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods*. Disciplining people, according to Foucault, is about much more than meting out actual, physical, or material violence.¹ While it is true that Foucault principally referenced industrialized European societies as opposed to Indigenous communities in lands now known as the Americas, Australia, or New Zealand, his ideas are germane to the role of education in colonial projects around the world. Maintaining social power relies on a mostly unstated and often obscure *threat* of violence that is, very importantly, buttressed by people coming to believe that the social systems within which they (we) live are, first and foremost, operating in their (our) best interests and, secondly, that it is their (our) right and duty to enfold others into those systems, for their own good.² Knowledge and associated belief systems of a particular society, what Foucault names as discourses, turn upon people accepting a common or universal knowledge against which anything else, or anything 'different,' is a deviation. Deviations come to be conceptualized as punishable, or to be actually punished, through violence or the threat of violence. Norms, or states of 'normalcy,' are valorized and rewarded ideologically, thus consistently (re)producing and (re)positioning them as logical, acceptable, and laudable phenomena to which all good and normal members of society should aspire.

Foucault was particularly interested in *how* we come to monitor ourselves and each other for signs of deviations from those senses of 'the normal' that we have internalized about ourselves and that we then come to believe are, naturally, in the best interest of others. For Foucault, the social power of normalcy rests on the production of difference, on differentiations between right and wrong, moral and immoral, normal and abnormal. But how does this occur? As explored

¹ Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1972); *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1977); 'Questions of Method', in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality with Two Lectures and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 73–86.

² See also, for instance, Ann Laura Stoler, 'Epistemic Politics: Ontologies of Colonial Common Sense', *The Philosophical Forum* (2008): 349–61.

by the authors in this book, education systems, including schools, curricula, pedagogy, teachers, and governments are fundamental to disciplining individuals and societies. Educational systems, as the authors of this text make clear, are principle means of trying (and *trying* is an operative word here, because there are always slippages and resistances) to acculturate subjects into particular ways of knowing and being. Education is critical to processes that ensure members of society are acculturated about why some ways of knowing and being are wrong, immoral, and abnormal while other ways of knowing and being are good, right, and normal. In other words, education is never neutral or benign. Education always fosters and maintains systems of social power. Education takes hard work – and great investment of resources across vastly different geographies and remarkably expansive timeframes – to ensure that ideas about what is normal and right are circulated, adapted, and brought into being. Education is an expensive, rigorously maintained, and deeply historical project. Critically understanding and unpacking the underpinnings of education, particularly in its service to empiric efforts of dispossessing Indigenous peoples, offers insights into the operations of hegemonic social structures and systems of power. It is thus worthwhile to understand educational systems because doing so allows understandings about how, potentially, to undo the many injustices that education has wittingly or unwittingly resulted in.

Expanding on Foucauldian thought, but focusing more expressly on colonialism and imperialism, Edward Said observed that the settling and taking of lands already occupied by someone else (Indigenous residents) requires an unexamined moral mission buttressed by an arsenal of media and cultural practices that support military-geo-strategic expansions into territory.³ State apparatuses, including the schools and educational sites that the authors in this book write about, are key to the production and circulation of moral missions and the cultural practices, products, and media upon which such missions rely. Education is vital to colonial work, another central tenet of this book. Schools and educational systems function in the production of cultural products (e.g., literature, music, art, and religious materials) and/or in instructing people from an early age towards a fluency in those cultural products. Cultural products become normative and can then be deployed in order to conceptualize and construct ‘Othered’ subjects who, by definition, are those not fluent in those cultural products. Of particular importance to colonial and imperial expansion, as we have written about elsewhere,⁴ are Said’s concepts about the persistent and pervasive (re)production of an Eastern Other for Eurowestern domination and consumption. This (re)production rests on ideas of difference and thus, at least in part, education plays an critical role in instructing

³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1994).

⁴ See for instance S. de Leeuw, A. Kobayashi, E. Cameron, ‘Difference’, in *A Companion to Social Geography*, ed. V.J. Del Casino Jr., M. Thomas, P. Cloke, and R. Panelli (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

about difference and otherness and then, within Othered places, in instructing Othered subjects about how to transform. Succinctly, and, as *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods* makes subtly clear, the production of and education about ‘an Other’ rests on reducing diverse times, spaces, and societies into an undifferentiated mass imbued with characteristics like barbarism and savagery against which the Eurowest (in this case Britain) understands itself as modern, cultured, and civilized. Indeed, the Eurowest might even be said to require a homogenous subjugated Other in great part in order to understand itself.⁵ This dualistic relationship positions Britain as entitled, if not required from a morally righteous perspective, to intervene into the lives and lands of those categorized as different or Other.

In Canada, New Zealand, and India, as *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods* elucidates, Indigenous peoples were those Others. And infant schools were the places where education, through various cultural products upon which pedagogic ideals rested, was put to work in the instruction and disciplining of those Othered children into what colonial subjects believed to be righteous social imperatives. These are, fundamentally, the lessons of *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods: Nineteenth-Century Missionary Infant Schools in Three British Colonies*. Over and over again we see the crucial role that education had in the empiric work of Britain during the nineteenth century, at home in the heart of empire and abroad. The book also demonstrates the remarkably small-scale nature of this empiric educational work;⁶ it was done, ultimately, in and upon the bodies and minds of children and within the comparatively small spaces of school rooms and educational compounds. These small spaces and even smaller bodies, however, were consistently positioned and repositioned within broad and expansive discursive structures comprised of government and ecumenical policies, philosophical debates, political maneuverings, and economic transformations. By making clear the linkages between diminutive geographies (children and schools), macro-scale sociopolitical and economic agendas, and the synergistic relationship between church and state in colonial education efforts, the book affords a unique understanding of the historical underpinnings of many contemporary social injustices that remain in former British colonies. This is perhaps the book’s greatest teaching, and something we are interested in charting and contemplating.

In further contemplating what *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods: Nineteenth-Century Missionary Infant Schools in Three British Colonies* teaches

⁵ See for instance Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁶ See also Sarah de Leeuw, ‘Intimate Colonialisms: The Material and Experienced Places of British Columbia’s Residential Schools’, *The Canadian Geographer: Special Issue, Historical Geographies of Colonialism* 51, no. 3 (2007): 339–59; Sarah de Leeuw, “‘If Anything is to be Done with the Indian, We Must Catch Him Very Young’”: Colonial Constructions of Aboriginal Children and the Geographies of Indian Residential Schooling in British Columbia, Canada’, *Children’s Geographies* 7, no. 2 (2009): 123–40.

us, we were struck by a number of dominant themes in the text, themes that weave themselves throughout all the chapters and link disparate people (Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples around the world), times (the book encompasses over 100 years of history), and places (principally three continents, but touching on more). The book anchors three in-depth case studies of schooling projects in New Zealand, India, and Canada in a deep and systematic review of the ways that various educational projects came into being, faded from style, sought to maintain validation and power, and shifted and adapted over time. The authors also, and importantly, demonstrate the amorphous and often accidental-seeming ways that ideas about the best and most effective ways of educating children circulated amongst those interested in missionizing and in pedagogic theory and practice. The authors are careful to chart the extraordinary resistances and resiliencies of Indigenous peoples as they navigated an often violent and most certainly confusing transformation of entire ways of living and being. The book makes clear that colonial education was a uniquely gendered and classed project, something not all studies of empiric and colonial projects do justice to. Finally, the very idea that educating children is always a socioculturally, geographically, and temporally engineered project – something that the authors of *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods* make clear – opens up the possibility of educational projects being (de)constructed and consequently re-tooled (re-engineered) for social change and social justice. Realization that the social construction of education and pedagogy is, fundamentally, a fragile and sometimes even happenstance occurrence also makes it eminently more open to dismantlement and thus a reconfiguring of it with the possibility of putting it to use in decolonizing efforts. Detailed historical investigation about education, the ilk of which *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods* clearly is, thus affords a vision of education for future generations around the world: education that has learned of and from its colonial past and, through such history lessons, might be put to service for social justice as opposed to the social injustices that we are now increasingly becoming aware of.

Much work has been done to demonstrate that empiric colonial work was large-scale in nature, focused on dispossessing people (Indigenous populations) from land and resources, often through geostrategic and military means, in order that colonial subjects and forces could acquire wealth and territory.⁷ Relatively less work, however, examines the intimate and small-scale nature of empiric colonial work. Furthermore, of that still burgeoning body of work, not much of it focuses clearly upon the complex, non-linear, messy, contradictory, and fragile nature of colonialism and its progenitors. Despite historian Ann Laura Stoler's impactful observations that the hierarchal terrains of colonialism relied deeply

⁷ See for instance, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 1999); Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2002); Daniel W. Clayton, 'Geographies of the Lower Skeena', *BC Studies* 94 (1992): 29–58.

on the domains of the intimate, and that it was precisely through the “tense and tender ties” of empire [that] relations of power were knotted and tightened, loosed and cut, tangled and undone’ and that ‘[t]hese ties are not the microcosms of empire, but its marrow,’⁸ there is a dearth of evidence about the role of education as central to the tender microcosms of empire. Clearly, however, as the authors of *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods* demonstrate, colonial Britain was deeply invested in tender microcosms, notably often very young children in infant schools in Canada, India, and New Zealand during the nineteenth century. Disciplining small bodies and minds in the ways of Christianity and the ‘high moral and educational’ standards of Britain was synonymous with expanding the British Empire. Schools, missions, and educational spaces were critical to this aim. Individual missionaries and teachers, sometimes accompanied by their families or a handful of colleagues, represented the more abstract and distant ‘heart of empire,’ underscoring again the small scale and diminutive nature of empiric and colonial work during the nineteenth century. These colonial educators took with them hard-fought pedagogic ideals and lessons that had been debated and experimented with in Britain. Little consensus, though, existed about the best way to educate children; was it a best practice to inculcate children by rote, didactic means or better to teach through physical and creative means focused on play and animate primal expressions? Although these questions were fodder for much theoretical discussion in the heart of Metropole, those on the colonial frontlines were often forced to adapt and shift, sometimes even learning from the Indigenous peoples who were ostensibly inferior. It was thus imperative for colonial educators to hold fast to ideologies that Indigenous Others were always, despite being ‘educated’ or even ‘civilized,’ innately (e.g., biologically and culturally) inferior. This, in many ways, was the most consistent component of colonial education focused on children in India, New Zealand, and Canada during the nineteenth century.

The places of infant schools were not staffed or run in a ways easy to make sense of within more traditional applications of post-colonial theory. For instance, colonial education made room – early on – for British women of a particular class who wanted to escape the strictures of gendered expectations at home. Missionizing and educating in distant lands afforded certain, privileged, British women opportunities to travel and lead independent lives. Thus, despite unquestionably being subservient members of nineteenth-century society, some British women became critical players in attempts to transform geographies far from their homes in the heart of empire. The work of these women, however, is a sharp contrast both to laboring women, who were understood as conscribed to lives in factories and whose children, potentially streamlined by education, were understood as fated to the same future, and to the Indigenous women and girls upon whom colonial education foisted imperial ideals. There are other interesting slippages

⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies’, in *Haunted by Empire*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler, 23–70, 26.

that the project of nineteenth-century colonial education was constantly forced to account for: how to address the need for, and thus role of, Indigenous Maori as teachers or mentors in infant schools in New Zealand? How to account for the remarkably well-considered thoughts of Bengali translators who were so integral to the ‘civilizing’ of children in India? How to stem the persistence of Indigenous languages being spoken by Aboriginal children attending schools in Canada, a persistence that undermined the ostensible supremacy and easiness of colonial power? By posing and considering the presences of these slippages, the authors of *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods* make clear that colonial education was not a straightforward or streamlined endeavor. Still, from the perspective of those whose lives were transformed and lands were reterritorialized, and who globally continue to be the embodiments of many health inequities, it remains the case that colonial education – and all that it buttressed and laid the foundations for – had lasting and devastating impacts.

Education, early childhood development, and Aboriginal (Indigenous) Status are three social determinants of health recognized, respectively, by the United Nations’ World Health Organization (WHO) and the Public Health Agency of Canada.⁹ Addressing these and the other major determinants of peoples’ health rests in part on understanding the broad ‘thematic areas’ that contain them and/or the outcomes that the various determinants result in. According to the World Health Organization, then, understanding the global disparities in health between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples requires applying a lens of social exclusion, in which colonial education and discriminatory early childhood development practices have played an important role. Social exclusion, as documented by the WHO and as can be comfortably theorized to be an extension/outcome of Saidian and Foucauldian ideas about power, social hierarchies, and Othering, has systematically led to the prohibiting of particular groups of people from engaging fully in community and social life. The result is a diminished state of health and well-being. At an eminently applied level, for instance, it is well documented that residential schooling in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia – the predecessors and foundations of which the authors of *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods* explore in detail – has directly impacted the well-being of Indigenous peoples in each of these countries.¹⁰ Not only was the project

⁹ Richard Wilkinson and Michael Marmot, eds, *Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts* (Geneva: WHO, 2003); Public Health Agency of Canada, *What Makes Canadians Healthy or Unhealthy?* (Ottawa, 2003). <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/determinants/determinants-eng.php> (accessed February 15, 2011).

¹⁰ See for instance, Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Crey, *Stolen from Our Embrace: The Abduction of First Nations Children and the Restoration of Aboriginal Communities* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre Lts, 1997); John Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879–1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999); Janet Smylie, ‘The Health of Aboriginal Peoples’, in *Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives*, 2nd ed., ed. Dennis Raphael (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2008), 281–301; Marvin Waterstone and Sarah

violent and premised upon an ideology of de-Indigenizing Aboriginal children – and consequently their families and communities – it has resulted in an abiding mistrust of educational systems in the twenty-first century. This mistrust results in lowered rates of literacy and a host of other challenges that can, and have been, linked back to early colonial projects. Indeed, and as we have written about elsewhere,¹¹ it is fundamental that when addressing health inequalities, attention be paid to educational projects that systematically Othered and pathologized Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples across Canada and around the world live what some call ‘third world conditions of health’ and what others refer to as the ‘embodiment of inequality.’¹² Although Canada is ranked among the best places to live in the world, if the United Nations Human Development Index was applied to Indigenous peoples living on-reserve, Canada would rank between 68th to 80th in the world.¹³ The health profiles of Indigenous peoples around the globe, including and notably in developed nations like Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, mirror those in Canada and thus, in the same way research from those countries has some bearing on Canada, discussions about the Canadian context may have relevance for those nations. Drawing linkages across wide geographies, as the authors of *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods* have done, seems fruitful, particularly when considering historic and neo-colonialism. There are remarkable differences in the twenty-first century between India, New Zealand, and Canada. All, however, were lands into which during the nineteenth century British subjects interceded with a host of educational efforts and aims to transform children, families, communities and, ultimately, the nations’ social systems and structures. In each country, because of vastly different geographies and the wide span of time over which the educational efforts unfolded, curricular and educational adaptations had to occur. Despite colonial educators being vested with ideological proclivities about the legitimacy of their work and the potential of its success, there was no straightforward or linear uptake of colonial lessons. Consequently, Canada, New Zealand, and India remain today utterly varied places – both internally and as compared with each other – with no indication of

de Leeuw, ‘A Sorry State: Apology Excepted’, *Human Geography: A New Radical Journal* 3, no. 3 (2010): 1–28.

¹¹ Sarah de Leeuw, Margo Greenwood, and Emilie Cameron, ‘Deviant Constructions: How Governments Preserve Colonial Narratives of Addictions and Poor Mental Health to Intervene into the Lives of Indigenous Children and Families in Canada’, *International Journal of Mental Health and Addictions* 8, no. 2 (2010): 282–95.

¹² Naomi Adelson, ‘The Embodiment of Inequity: Health Disparities in Aboriginal Canada’, *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 96 (2005): S45–S61.

¹³ Marlyn Bennett, Cindy Blackstock, and Richard de La Ronde, ‘A Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography on Aspects of Aboriginal Child Welfare in Canada’, (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal, 2005); Ann Silversides, ‘The North “Like Darfur”’, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 177, no. 9 (2007): 1013–14; Paul Webster, ‘Canadian Aboriginal People’s Health and the Kelowna Deal’, *The Lancet* 368, no. 9523 (2006): 275–6.

being simple, uncomplicated, iconic mirror representations of the empiric force (Britain) which made such efforts to educate in its own image.

As we have alluded to, perhaps one of the most important lessons offered by *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods* is that colonial education was a constantly adapting, and in many cases a hybridized and even somewhat haphazard, project. It nevertheless spawned trends and structures that arguably reach into the twenty-first century, often to calamitous ends for Indigenous peoples. Acknowledging the confused although powerful nature of nineteenth century education in infant schools in India, New Zealand, and Canada to some extent makes colonial instruction more fragile, easier to critique and thus, perhaps most importantly, easier to emplace and then (hopefully) dismantle in contemporary times. Indeed, and particularly in Canada and New Zealand, it feels imperative for today's educators to acknowledge the colonizing roots of their/our histories and profession. In other words, only by charting and understanding the work of historic colonial educational imperatives – many of which in Canada, India, and New Zealand sat alongside and informed the educational systems within which we work today and within which our children learn – will it ever be possible to decolonize the present. Doing this is an urgent necessity, particularly given that Indigenous children continue to grow up on the margins of health and well-being, inheritors of a colonial and educational past that was neither of their making nor under their direction and in which, mostly, they did not willingly choose to partake. Despite this urgency, and also as the authors of *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods* make clear, it is vital we never overlook the incredible strength and resiliency of people who still live and thrive in New Zealand, Canada, and India. British colonial education in the nineteenth century was premised upon the basic assumption that it would, and could, transform the bodies and minds of children, thereby transforming the communities and societies of which they were a part and which they would grow up to lead. Certainly social transformations abounded; and they continue to do so. But those transformations do not follow, nor have they ever followed, clear-cut instructions that those at the helm of education so deeply believed they would. It might even be said that the last and most important lesson of *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods* is that people, particularly Indigenous peoples, can, did, and always will, thrive and survive despite educational paradigms that claim to know what is best for them.